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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MEXICO 000847

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SUBJECT: PRD AIRS DIRTY LAUNDRY AT NATIONAL COUNCIL MEETING

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Charles V. Barclay, Reasons  
: 1.4(b/d).

Summary

1. (SBU) Summary. On February 10-11, delegates of the Revolutionary Democratic Party (PRD) gathered for their annual National Executive Council (CEN) meeting to discuss their strategy for the 2007 state elections. The high-level meeting quickly devolved into a strident clash over a single issue, the proposed candidacy on the PRD ticket of Ana Rosa Payan -- a lifelong PANista -- for governor of Yucatan. Payan's nomination was widely seen as a move by failed PRD presidential candidate Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) to reassert his authority over the party. AMLO's apparent endorsement of a candidate long associated with the PAN's more conservative wing angered many in the PRD. After Payan publicly distanced herself from AMLO, the latter withdrew his support, allowing Payan's candidacy to fail at the CEN meeting. In apparent response to AMLO's authoritarian tactics. New Left faction leader Jesus Ortega called for a "horizontal re-organization" of the party, in which all faction leaders would participate in negotiating agreements/positions on all issues. The dispute at the CEN meeting laid bare the increasingly sharp fault line between those who remain loyal to a radicalized AMLO, and those who seek to remake the PRD in a more moderate -- and politically viable -- image. End Summary.

Proposed candidacy of ex-PANista controversial

2. (SBU) On February 10-11, over 300 PRD delegates gathered in Mexico City for their annual CEN meeting, during which delegates were to discuss a broad strategy for upcoming state elections. One issue -- the proposed candidacy on the PRD ticket for governor of Yucatan of the popular former Mayor of Merida, Ana Rosa Payan -- soon overshadowed the rest of the agenda. Payan, a lifelong PANista associated with that party's conservative wing, had sought the PRD gubernatorial candidacy after losing what she alleged had been a rigged PAN primary. According to local news reports, Payan had reached an agreement with AMLO representatives to run on a joint PRD-PT-Convergencia ticket.

3. (SBU) The proposed candidacy of Payan immediately sparked controversy within the PRD. Several PRD leaders, mainly from the moderate faction known as the New Left (aka "los Chuchos," the nickname of faction leader Jesus Ortega), lashed out at the notion of a lifelong conservative

representing a leftist party. Perhaps ironically, the Chuchos, which rival more radical, pro-AMLO forces in the party, saw Payan's nomination as a move by AMLO to reassert his authority over the party. They also objected to AMLO's perceived abandonment of party principles for political expediency.

¶4. (U) AMLO apparently supported Payan's candidacy because her popularity gave her a strong chance of winning the state house for the PRD, even if she had been an ideological opponent of the PRD for many years. AMLO presumably calculated that if Payan were elected on a joint PRD-PT-Convergencia ticket, she would be loyal to him, notwithstanding her own political history. However, after Payan was quoted as saying that "she would have nothing to do with AMLO," that she would not necessarily include PRD members in her cabinet, and that she recognized Felipe Calderon's legitimacy as President and considered him a personal friend, AMLO withdrew his support, leading party president Leonel Cota and other AMLO allies to do the same, and triggering the defeat of Payan's proposed candidacy by the CEN.

¶5. (SBU) In scathing remarks before the CEN, PRD General Secretary Guadalupe Acosta, an Ortega ally, made it clear

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that AMLO and his allies bore full responsibility for the Payan fiasco. He accused PRD President Leonel Cota of being subservient to his "patron saint," i.e., AMLO, and of not being faithful to the party line and to the decisions of the CEN. He also openly criticized AMLO himself for proposing Payan's nomination, while instructing others in the party to hide his role in her selection. Dolores Padierna, leader of the PRD faction known as the National Democratic Left (IDN), also denounced Payan's candidacy because of her "ultra-right"

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positions; "If she wins, what does the left win?" she asked.

Cota Falls on His Sword

¶6. (SBU) For his part, Cota denied accusations by Acosta and others that AMLO engineered the Payan proposal. Costa assumed full responsibility for both proposing Payan's candidacy and ultimately rescinding his support. He improbably told the CEN that he made these decisions independently and in what he considered to be the interests of the party. In a further sign of internal party divisions, Cota said he would be relieving controversial party spokesman Gerardo Fernandez Norona, of his responsibilities, and would himself assume the responsibilities of party spokesman. He also volunteered to leave the party presidency ahead of schedule, in February 2008, a proposal that was only narrowly rejected by a 74-71 vote.

Chuchos seek PRD re-organization

¶7. (U) Apparently in response to AMLO's increasingly authoritarian tactics, Chuchos' leader Jesus Ortega called for a profound and rapid reorganization of the party "to revive its democratic principles." He suggested a horizontal reorganization in which all faction leaders work together to negotiate common agreements, rather than a vertical organization where one leader -- implicitly AMLO -- makes all the decisions. Other Chucho leaders, including Acosta and PRD Senate Coordinator Carlos Navarrette, supported Ortega. Navarrette denied that the New Left was trying to distance itself from AMLO, adding "to do so would be political suicide." Rather, he said he sought to "strengthen the PRD as an institution and make it more efficient together with Obrador and other party leaders." Party factions agreed to begin a reorganization process by appointing new secretaries of the Planning and Organization commissions. CEN

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delegates agreed to hold an extraordinary party congress on August 16-19, at which the party's reorganization will be reconsidered.

Comment

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18. (C) The Payan fiasco exposed the sharp division between those who remain loyal to AMLO and those who seek to steer the PRD on to a more moderate course. We consider the rejection of Payan's candidacy and the removal of the party's pro-AMLO spokesman to be victories for more moderate, PRD factions, led by the Chuchos, over those loyal to AMLO. It is particularly interesting that Acosta openly criticized AMLO and Cota. The last PRDista to openly criticize the self-proclaimed "legitimate president" -- party founder Cuauhtemoc Cardenas -- was quickly marginalized. At this point, we will be watching to see whether, on the one hand, AMLO and his allies are able to punish Acosta for his criticisms, and whether, on the other hand, moderate PRD leaders opt out of the next major AMLO event, the so-called "National Democratic Convention" scheduled to take place in Mexico City March 21-23.

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